

# Metro

## Project Yields Taste of King Dream

### Descendants of Slaves and Masters Meet

ART GOLAB  
WRITER

Martin Luther King dreamed one day "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

His dream came true Thursday morning in a conference room at Roosevelt University, but it didn't come easily.

Guilt, anger, resentment and justification bubbled to the surface when 10 descendants of slaves met with 10 women and men whose families had owned slaves or had been members of the Ku Klux Klan.

The occasion was a research project started by Mona Sue Weissmark, an assistant professor of psychology at Roosevelt. The project was the first of several designed to heal the racial rifts stemming from slavery.

Families pass down hate and resentment from generation to generation," Weissmark said. "If we want to intervene in that cycle of feelings, the best way to do that is to bring both sides to the table."

The conversation was awkward at first during a get-acquainted session, but the two groups Thursday evening ate up quickly.

Some participants winced as Yaw Pfosu, 29, remembered



Project participants Yaw Pfosu (left) and Dr. Dan Giacomo light black and white candles Thursday.

ROBERT A. DAVIS/SUN-TIMES

hearing his mother describe how her grandmother had been raped by a slave master. "There's a lot of pain ... it affects me every day," Tatum said.

And blacks cringed as two white participants described hearing from grandparents that slaves had been treated like family. Andrew Holland said his grandmother had spoken of her mother's picking cotton in the field with slaves.

"There are a lot of stereotypes about slave owners," Holland said. "The majority did not beat their

slaves. Slavery was legal—I'm not saying it was right."

Donna Carter, descended from both slaves and slave owners, responded that no matter how well some were treated, "over 400 years, a lot of slaves got beaten, whipped and sold off from their families."

"It's difficult not to harbor some resentment," said Vera Adams, whose mother's grandfather was born into slavery. "The country has never said it's sorry it happened, and I think it's time for

that to be said—because it did happen and it happened to my family."

Most of the white participants expressed sorrow for their forebears' actions. Although Rachel Loftin's family owned slaves more than 130 years ago on an Arkansas farm, she said she still feels some responsibility. "I always wanted to prove to black people that I wasn't prejudiced, that I don't have this hate my ancestors had."

Cindy Fabry, descendant of a Ku Klux Klan member, said: "I

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want to be different from my family. I am different from my family.

When Fabry said she feared African-American participants would hate her because of ancestry, Pela Cain interrupted, saying, "I don't feel any hate."

At the end the two groups weren't embracing, but Tatum was looking forward to more sessions that will last through the week.

"Once you sit down and talking to each other, you find a lot of connections," he said. "It breaks down the wall."